


Gay is a term that is generally used to describe a person who experiences attraction to people of the same gender as they are.


While this term has mostly been used to describe men who are attracted to other men, people of all genders use it to describe their orientation today.

The gay community is very large, and includes all kinds of different sub-communities and cultures. For instance, *bear* is used to describe a gay man who is plus size and identifies with an image of rugged masculinity.



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NORTHERN
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all about **GAY** **IDENTITIES**



We acknowledge the generous support of the Government of Canada for the redevelopment of our educational resources and materials.



Women and Gender
Equality Canada

Femmes et Égalité
des genres Canada



Developed by Jacq Brasseur, with support from
Catherine Currie following consultation with
2SLGBTQIPA+ Northerners in 2021/2022.

HISTORY OF HOMOSEXUALITY

Homosexuality was first defined as a way of pathologizing undesired behaviour. When the term was introduced, it was introduced in a medical context: referring to people with a certain type of mental disorder or psychological illness.

What a lot of people don't realize is that the term **heterosexuality** was actually coined in a similar way. In 1901, "Dorland's Medical Dictionary defined heterosexuality as an "abnormal or perverted appetite toward the opposite sex."¹ The term heterosexual as we know it today was not popularized until the mid-1930s.

The term **gay** was not popularized to refer to people who had same-gender attraction until the '60s, and up until then, the term "homophile" was often used by people within the community.

While the first use (in popular media) of the term gay in relation to same-gender attraction happened in the 1950s, it wasn't until 1960 that this became a popular synonym.

¹ Ambrosino, B. (2017). The invention of 'heterosexuality'. BBC.

GAY COMMUNITY FAQs

What makes a person gay?

Most research done regarding sexual orientation has indicated that there isn't one thing that makes a person gay. Many scientists and sociologists believe that both nature (how a person is born) and nurture (the experiences a person has throughout their life) play a role in how a person experiences sexual attraction.

It can be helpful to remember that same sex relationships have been documented in over 450 animal species, so this does suggest that gay people are a natural part of the human species.

Why are so many more people gay now than there used to be?

While it might seem like more people are identifying as gay or 2SLGBTQIPA+ today, social scientists believe that this increase is more to do with an increased social acceptance of gay people than a shift in how many people experience same sex attraction.

Instead of seeing this as "more people are gay", consider "more people feel comfortable being open about being gay".

Can sexual orientation be changed?

Efforts to change people's sexual orientation have overwhelmingly been debunked by modern science.

While there are many organizations or groups that claim to be able to change a person's sexual orientation, there is no evidence that this is actually true or possible.

AM I GAY?

The important thing to remember is that you don't have to use certain words to describe yourself just because that's the "box" that you fit into. That being said, here are some things that might apply to you if you're part of the gay community:

- you find yourself attracted to people who are the same gender as you
- you think about being physically intimate with people who are the same gender as you
- you want to have romantic or physical partnerships with people who are the same gender as you.

If you are a gay person in the NWT looking for support or community, reach out to us.

HOMOPHOBIA & HETEROSEXISM

Homophobia is generally defined as a fear, hatred, mistreatment of, or negative attitudes towards people who are not straight, because of their sexual orientation or perceived sexual orientation.

Heterosexism refers to the systemic ways in which heterosexual people are considered the standard, and that non-heterosexual people are limited to participating fully in society or systems.

Homophobia and heterosexism both contribute to the stigma, violence and harm that gay people experience every day.

If you are looking to learn more about gay identity, sexuality or homophobia, talk to us about our workshops!